

## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. (Previously Presented) Apparatus for protecting a composite-body aircraft against damage from lightning strikes, comprising:

5           an aircraft body including a plurality of composite panels;  
          a first plurality of electrically conductive splice plates extending along junctions between adjacent ones of the composite panels at respective edges of the adjacent composite panels, the first plurality of electrically conductive splice plates abutting exterior surfaces of the composite panels;

10           a second plurality of electrically conductive splice plates extending along the junctions between adjacent ones of the composite panels at respective edges of the adjacent composite panels, the second plurality of electrically conductive splice plates abutting interior surfaces of the composite panels;

          a plurality of electrically conductive straps; and  
15           a plurality of electrically conductive fasteners;  
          wherein the straps and the fasteners mechanically and electrically couple adjacent ends of the splice plates to one another such that the splice plates form a continuous, electrically conductive grid about the aircraft body.

2. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the continuous,  
20 electrically conductive grid extends to the outermost lateral periphery of the aircraft body.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Canceled)

5. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the first plurality of electrically conductive splice plates comprise titanium.

25 6. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the aircraft body comprises a blended-wing-body ("BWB") aircraft.

7. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of composite panels comprise graphite fibers.

30 8. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the aircraft body includes an electrical system, and wherein the electrically conductive grid comprises a ground return path of the electrical system.

9. (Previously Presented) A method for protecting a composite-body aircraft against damage from lightning strikes, comprising:

coupling adjacent composite panels on an aircraft body to one another at respective edges of the adjacent composite panels using electrically conductive splice plates, electrically conductive straps and electrically conductive fasteners;

wherein the straps and the fasteners mechanically and electrically couple adjacent ends of the splice plates to one another such that the splice plates form a continuous, electrically conductive grid about the aircraft body; and

further wherein a first plurality of the electrically conductive splice plates extend along junctions between the adjacent composite panels and abut exterior surfaces of the composite panels, and a second plurality of the electrically conductive splice plates extend along the junctions between the adjacent composite panels and abut interior surfaces of the composite panels.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 9, wherein the continuous, electrically conductive grid extends to the outermost lateral periphery of the exterior surface of the aircraft body.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Canceled)

13. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 9, wherein the first plurality of the electrically conductive splice plates comprise titanium.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 9, wherein the aircraft body comprises a blended-wing-body ("BWB") aircraft.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 9, wherein the composite panels comprise graphite fibers.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 9, wherein the aircraft body includes an electrical system, and wherein the electrically conductive grid comprises a ground return path of the electrical system.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Previously Presented) An aircraft body, comprising:

a plurality of composite panels, adjacent pairs of the composite panels defining a V-shaped groove therebetween; and

a plurality of electrically conductive splice plates disposed within the grooves such that an exterior surface of each splice plate is flush with exterior surfaces of the adjacent pair of composite panels;

wherein adjacent ends of the splice plates are mechanically and electrically coupled to one another such that the splice plates form a continuous, electrically conductive grid about the aircraft body.

19. (Previously Presented) The aircraft body of Claim 18, further comprising a plurality of electrically conductive straps and a plurality of electrically conductive fasteners, wherein the straps and the fasteners mechanically and electrically couple the adjacent ends of the splice plates to one another.

20. (Previously Presented) The aircraft body of Claim 18, wherein the electrically conductive splice plates comprise titanium.

21. (Previously Presented) The aircraft body of Claim 18, wherein the aircraft body comprises a blended-wing-body ("BWB") aircraft.

22. (Previously Presented) The aircraft body of Claim 18, wherein the continuous, electrically conductive grid extends to the outermost lateral periphery of the exterior surface of the aircraft body.

23. (Previously Presented) The aircraft body of Claim 18, wherein the composite panels comprise graphite fibers.

24. (Previously Presented) The aircraft body of Claim 18, wherein the aircraft body includes an electrical system, and the electrically conductive grid comprises a ground return path of the electrical system.